

Reforming Educational Administration: Ethical Considerations

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Serious ethical questions regarding the preparation of prospective school administrators have arisen as a result of the American educational reform movement. The university is responsible to a number of stakeholders. Of primary concern are the students, the state, and the employing school district. Of equal concern, but further removed from direct contact with the university, are the faculty, students, and parents in the employing school district. Thus, preparation programs for administrators who will lead schools and school districts have considerable social impact. Ethical questions center on the university's recognition of its social responsibility and its understanding of the social consequences of graduating ill-prepared administrators. As a result faculty in educational administration programs must consider the motives, means, and consequences of these programs.

Il y a actuellement un mouvement américain de réforme de l'éducation qui soulève de sérieuses questions d'éthique dans la formation d'administrateurs scolaires. L'université est responsable d'un certain nombre de choses dans ce domaine. Le plus important dans tout cela est sans contredit, les étudiants, l'état, les parents, et le district scolaires. Bien qu'indirectement reliés à l'université, la faculté, les étudiants et les parents du district scolaire, sont également touchés par ces questions. Ainsi, les programmes préparatoires pour ceux qui administreront les écoles et les districts scolaires ont un impact social considérable. Comme questions d'éthique, relevons entre autres la reconnaissance par l'université de sa responsabilité et de sa compréhension des conséquences sociales dans l'attribution de diplômes à des administrateurs mal préparés. Conséquemment, les facultés d'administration éducationnelle doivent considérer les buts, les ressources et les conséquences des programmes en cours.

Faculties of colleges and universities must examine the impact of their programs on those constituencies they are obligated to serve. Debate should focus on the relationship that ought to exist between the university and its constituencies or stakeholders. This relationship is abused when one party takes unfair advantage of the other. When this occurs serious ethical issues are raised. In effect, the ethical implications inherent in preparing school administrators identify the university as a moral agent.

Thus, the university assumes responsibility for its actions; it is required to make wise decisions, choose between competing ideas, encourage a free and open debate, and respect the basic rights and dignity of its members (Strike, Holler, & Soltis, 1988).

The ethical relationship between the university in general and colleges of education and their stakeholders in particular raises a series of questions: Does the university have a responsibility to act as a gatekeeper for public school districts? Should the university consider itself as part of the economic system and thus seek to secure a profit for its owners? To whom is the university responsible? What guidelines should be used to determine the ethical implications of preparation programs? Do current educational administration training programs meet ethical standards? What does the university owe to its students? Does the university exist as an interdependent agency? My purpose in this paper is to consider these ethical questions as they relate to university sponsored educational administration training programs. I make certain assumptions regarding the concept of social contract and acknowledge that assumptions, liberal and positivist, are not argued.

Ethical questions regarding preparation are seldom addressed by the university since its inherent culture is slow to respond when confronted with demand for change. The reluctance to respond rapidly to demands for change limits the options that are available to meet evolving societal needs. "Education can bind people to the past; it can be narrow and bigoted ... [or] it can train people to face the future with vision" (Titus & Keeton, 1966, p. 317). The current model of preparation of school administrators in America has come under strong criticism. It is viewed as driven by state certification requirements where faculty give priority to economic considerations and less than rigorous standards are employed. This paradigm has remained consistent for more than a quarter century and has been adopted by universities throughout the United States (Cooper & Boyd, 1988). It has resulted in certification as a prerequisite to appointment (Murphy & Hallinger, 1989). Thus, it attracts a large number of students who are willing to enter into an unwritten agreement with professors that allows both parties to bring as little as possible to the

preparation process. It is little wonder that graduate courses in educational administration are among the most popular. The reward of the degree and certification far outweighs the small investment that must be made in completing a program that lacks both substance and quality.

Ideally, certification assures the public that those hired as administrators are competent. However, the certification process requires only paper documentation that specified courses have been taken. Consequently, compliance with certification regulations often takes precedence over quality in student selection, program development, or program outcomes. This has led educational administration departments to measure their success with such variables as large enrollments, increased numbers of graduates, and a growing extension program. Thus, many researchers have concluded that the majority of educational administration preparation programs focus on certification as opposed to competence, endorse nonsequential and nonintegrated courses rather than a well-defined and integrated knowledge base (Achilles, 1988), and are more concerned with credit-hour production than with quality control (Hoyle, 1985).

Faculty who represent educational administration preparation programs have demonstrated a reluctance to answer the growing criticism of researchers, legislators, and practitioners regarding the need for restructuring the preparation of school administrators (Greer, 1988; Leslie, Snyder, & Giddis, 1988). This resistance may be a result of the university structure where faculty are slow to change and react to criticism (Sykes, 1988). Another possibility is the faculty's inability to move from a Newtonian model that is driven by fixed systems and linear thinking to an Einsteinian model that is driven by flexible systems and multiple levels of thinking (Fantini, 1986).

Although resistance to change is strong, there is a recurrent theme in the American educational reform movement which argues that schools should be led by principals who are strong and visionary leaders. Many researchers believe that school leadership should focus on instruction and curriculum, human development, shared governance strategies, and a well-conceived mission (Hoyle, 1989). Highly trained, highly competent school

administrators are an important variable in the quality of education that young people receive (Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988). Poor leaders, those without the above-mentioned qualities, may cause harm to students, teachers, and other administrators.

Burns (1978) speaks of the importance of moral leadership where

leaders and led have a relationship not only of power but of mutual needs, aspirations, and values; ... followers have adequate knowledge of alternative leaders and programs and the capacity to choose among those alternatives; and ... leaders take responsibility for their commitments. (p. 4)

School leaders who fail to take seriously their commitment to their followers may violate the fiduciary relationship that exists between leaders and followers. For example, if the principal's primary concern is to please politically powerful community groups then decisions may be made that give undue advantage to groups with vested interests. Resources may flow to sports programs and not to academic ones. The principal may support a winning coach who is a poor classroom teacher. As Burns (1978) points out, these are the kinds of differences that discriminate between transactional and transformational leaders. Transactional leaders exchange rewards for performance of duties. Transformational leaders enter into relationships with followers that build both parties, turning followers into leaders and leaders into moral agents. This represents the difference between what happens when priority is given to personal interests and when primary consideration is given to the welfare of the entire community.

Current American educational administration programs generally have not required students to reflect on their social responsibility as leaders. For example, required courses in educational ethics seem to be nonexistent. Failure to address this issue in a timely and constructive manner results in the graduation of students who may not have the capacity to be transformational leaders. Thus, the reform of American educational administration training programs is an ethical as well as an educational issue.

Traditionally, there has been little, if any, effort to frame training programs in an ethical or moral context. There seems to exist a conflict between those who view the university experience as purely an academic exercise and those who view theory as related to the world of practice. Such other professional schools as law, medicine, and business have opted to relate theory to practice and require the framing of the application of theory within a perspective that takes into account the professional's social responsibility. Calabrese (1990) argues that the public school is primarily an institution whose "core value structure is concerned with developing citizens who will support and reinforce dominant civic and ethical values" (p. 11). It would seem that those who are prepared to lead organizations must give strong consideration to their social responsibility.

Ironically, the university assumes that preparation programs contain appropriate content. This leaves responsibility for learning with the student. This position ignores the university's social responsibility to the student and the community. Being socially responsible signifies that the university, its members, the students, and the community are interdependent; they share a common value system. In essence, the university exists at the pleasure of society and is not an end in itself (Sherwin, 1983). When the university makes a decision where there is a choice among values (either good or bad or good or better), because there is choice between the quality of values an ethical decision is made (Blandshared, 1966). As a result, when preparation programs and their impact on stakeholders are examined, it is clear that decisions have ethical implications since alternatives are not of equal value.

In effect, the university's social responsibility is expressed in a social contract which is concerned with the relationship among various groups who come together for a specific purpose. Rawls (1958) speaks of this relationship as one of fair play where all members benefit from participation. Acting unfairly or unethically occurs when one of the parties uses the rules to its advantage. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson spoke of the social contract between governments and the governed where the government serves at the consent of the governed.

When the social contract is broken by the government, the governed have the right to dissolve the government.

The university has a social contract with a variety of stakeholders including the school board, students, parents, and the community. The school board is formally responsible for hiring school administrators and teachers. Since the school board represents the community, it has a legitimate right to expect that university preparation programs will have set standards that prevent admittance to unqualified people. It also has a right to expect that preparation programs will eliminate students who will be harmful as school administrators. In effect, the social contract between the university and the community is one where the university's responsibility is to assume an activist role as gatekeeper by maintaining strong standards and providing the highest quality academic program.

The social contract between the university and the student implies that the university will provide the highest possible level of preparation in terms of instruction and curriculum. This includes understanding the adult student, using effective delivery systems, and establishing standards that stretch the learner. The social contract also implies that the student will take advantage of the preparation and pursue the tasks required with concentrated energy and application.

A social contract also exists between the university and state certification agencies which require a set of courses designed to produce competent students. The university's contract with the state is to guarantee that specified courses are being taught, that the courses have a specific knowledge base, and that a passing grade and/or diploma in the program is indicative of competence.

Failure by the university to meet the terms of the social contract signifies an abrogation of trust on one hand or simple incompetence on the other. This failure is compounded by the fact that there is an efficient and legitimate remedy for those who are harmed by certified administrators. Even though the court system has consistently upheld the rights of parents and students to seek due process to pursue grievances, the structure of the

existing school culture mitigates against this except in the most blatant cases.

Many parents are unwilling to challenge sanctioned authority beyond initial levels. In some cases, the principal's survival is the result of an unwritten agreement with teachers where mutual and unconditional support is pledged against external aggression. These challenges are often considered life threatening to the organization.

If there is a role for due process, it is directed toward the most visible parties: school boards, superintendents, and principals. The university and faculty responsible for the preparation of administrators are not held accountable for faulty products (e.g., incompetent school principals). Only the school district can fire an incompetent school superintendent or principal. Young children cannot comprehend when schools are poorly led nor can they effectively communicate the signs of poor leadership to their parents. In effect, even though the university has a profound responsibility to live up to its social contract, there are few, if any, means of accountability. The university must examine the extent of its social commitment and responsibility (Tuleja, 1985).

The university cannot bear this burden alone. It must be shared with the school district. The university, because it serves the public, certifies that a degree insures that an individual has the prerequisite knowledge base to practice. The focus on accountability allows an examination of educational administration preparation programs to determine if they meet the criteria that signify the fulfillment of a social contract. These criteria include the university's motives in offering a preparation program, its means in terms of curriculum and delivery systems, and the consequences or quality of the product it produces. If the means, motives, and consequences are self-serving then the social contract is violated; this is a serious ethical concern (Titus & Keeton, 1966).

The university's response to the fundamental ethical questions raised in this paper determines its relationship with its stakeholders. However, these questions can only be addressed when faculty members are willing to

examine critically their motivation for the existence of their preparation programs, the means they employ to deliver these programs, and the quality of the product they produce. Thus, the internal examination becomes unique to each institution. In effect, it requires faculty members to become accountable for their programs. An analysis of these motives, means, and consequences is useful in considering fundamental programmatic ethical questions.

The Motive

Motive relates to intention. What is the reason for the existence of the preparation program? Has the program defined its stakeholders and are its actions in the stakeholders' best interests? If the motive is unethical, then the means and consequences are also likely to be unethical. For example, if a public university chooses to offer a program strictly for economic gain without consideration for the needs of its stakeholders, then it violates its social contract. It uses a means that is likely to attract large numbers without primary consideration for the effectiveness of the instruction. The consequences of such actions are increased enrollments and credit hour production with little regard for product quality.

In this context, one might claim that the current motive for many educational administration preparation programs is market demand. These programs provide consumers with an efficient means of becoming certified; in turn, enrollments are relatively high. This focuses on quantity rather than quality. In one sense, it is driven by a belief that students in administration programs are teachers who are intellectually capable. The program has to satisfy only certification requirements. These requirements have not always been well-defined nor rigorous. For example, as late as 1980, Massachusetts required a master's degree in any educational field, one course in administration, and one other course to be certified as a school principal. The superintendency required only curriculum courses at the elementary and secondary level.

This is not an isolated example. Educational administration preparation programs have developed a series of nonrelated courses that equip students

with content from an array of administrative areas. Educational reform literature strongly suggests that there is no assurance that the current knowledge base, if one does exist, prepares students to assume transformational leadership roles. There is little evidence that the current motive for preparation programs places primary consideration on the welfare of its stakeholders. This is more pronounced at nonresearch oriented universities where the university has a regional responsibility to prepare teachers and administrators. Faculty at these institutions prepare 85% of school administrators in America. They are not held to the same standards in terms of peer review; however, they are able to meet the political realities of a narrowly defined regional constituency.

The Means

The means address the content and delivery of the program. When the means do not consider the welfare of all parties, the social contract is broken. Effective means are those which focus on the needs of all stakeholders. Thus, before a preparation program for administrators can be established, the needs of the stakeholders and the knowledge base capable of providing the content necessary for success must be identified. Student learning styles must be considered as well as a set of standards that will help to identify those students who are not capable of quality work.

Current means are criticized as outdated (Murphy, 1989). Greenfield (1988) states that a program based on these means is "a fact driven model of decision making and rationality" (p. 54) which has little connection to practice. Rather than providing a means that demands quality candidates, high standards, and a curriculum that relates theory to practice, such a program stresses quantity as the guiding standard (Achilles, 1988). This results in many programs becoming dysfunctional: They no longer produce a product that is needed.

The Consequences

Consequences are concerned with the results of the preparation program. What type of leaders or administrators are produced? How effective are these individuals as school administrators? According to Bliss (1988) there is no shortage of available administrative candidates. These candidates are not viewed as competent as are administration candidates in other professions; they have not been prepared to be proactive in their support for educational change. They lack vision, leadership skills, modern management skills, and courage to make important instructional decisions (Griffiths, Stout, & Forsyth, 1988).

Ironically, those most responsible for this product, professors of educational administration, have failed to react constructively to criticism. Instead, state legislators have had to move to elevate the training of school administrators by creating administrator or leadership academies. State organizations have little choice but to remove additional preparation from the private domain of the university when programs at the master's, specialist, and doctoral levels are frequently indistinguishable (Norton & Levan, 1988; Peterson & Finn, 1988).

The consequences represent the final product. What kind of principal is the graduate? Is the principal able to grasp educational issues? Is the principal able to motivate faculty, students, and the community? The consequences are often separated by time from the instructional process. This separation between preparation and practice allows the university to remove itself from accepting responsibility for the quality of the graduate. Yet, the university has to accept responsibility for its success or failure in producing competent, socially responsible, transformational leaders. When a faculty focuses on quality, its program is grounded in an ethical response to its stakeholders. Thus, a quality and ethical focus are linked.

Conclusion

In this paper I considered a series of questions related to university sponsored educational administration preparation programs. These

questions served as a focus for the social contract that exists between the university and a varied group of stakeholders. Understanding the responsibilities inherent in the social contract is important when considering the effects of educational administration preparation programs on students, parents, teachers, and school boards.

These programs have a major impact on society. As a result universities have a responsibility to examine the ethical nature of their programs if they are to maintain their public trust (Delattre, 1988). Failure to fulfill the conditions inherent in a trust commonly agreed to by members of a democratic community constitutes unethical behavior. The conditions of that trust, as they are related to the preparation of school administrators, establish an ethical framework for proceeding with the restructuring of educational administration preparation programs as proposed in national reports (University Council for Educational Administration, 1987; National Policy Board, 1989).

Faculty members in educational administration preparation programs are being challenged to review their social contract with stakeholders and to respond to the changing demands of society. There is no single correct answer to questions about the fulfilling of this contract. However, failing to define quality standards, ignoring the increasing call of critics, and defending self-interests creates a posture that is not responsive to community needs. This is even more poignant when one observes increasing numbers of private sector organizations demonstrating commitment to the public. The Johnson and Johnson response to the Tylenol scare is a prime example. In this case, Johnson and Johnson removed all Tylenol from markets when it was reported that cyanide was discovered in its product. Johnson and Johnson led the market in developing tamper-proof packaging and in educating the public regarding the safety of its product.

Those responsible for the preparation of educational administrators must recognize the fiduciary nature of their roles. Acceptance of moral responsibility creates an environment where the university views itself as the end, not the means. Ethical decisions regarding preparation must

include the elimination of nonproductive programs, the denial of acceptance to marginal students, the failing of students who do not perform effectively in the classroom, the restructuring of delivery systems to meet adult needs, and constant evaluation to insure quality control. In the end, the university and the stakeholders must benefit mutually from their social contract.

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